

## Chapter 9

### LEARN ABOUT NAMES

*Learning more about Greek names will be very helpful to your research*

#### GIVEN NAMES

There is only one way of spelling a Greek given name. If it is found with a different spelling it means the person who wrote it made a spelling mistake.



**The Konsta brothers with nephew  
Nikolaos D. Katsakis. Athens 1914**

#### Naming children

A child receives his/her name during baptism, when still an infant, some times as young as a few days old. The name is given by the godfather (or godmother) who may choose a name of a member of his own family or any other name. If the godfather desires to ask the parent's preference, then most of the times the parents follow the tradition according which the children in a family are named as follows:

- The first son is named after the father's father.
- The second son is named after the mother's father.

- The first daughter is named after the father's mother
- The second daughter is named after the mother's mother.
- Other children in the family are usually named after uncles or other relatives, saints, friends etc.
- A son is never named after his father unless the father is deceased at the time the infant is named.
- A daughter is never named after the mother unless the mother dies before the daughter is named.

This custom is not necessarily followed in every case but when followed, it can greatly simplify a search for the names of grandparents.

If a child dies young, then another child, born later, would most likely be given the same name.

Example:

If a girl named Vasiliki dies and later the parents have a new baby girl, they most likely will name the new baby Vasiliki also. But if the new baby is a boy they may name him Vasilis which is the male form of that name.

If a male infant appears to have little chance of surviving, he is named Θεόδωρος [Theodoros] meaning God's gift, or Θεοχάρης [Theoharis], meaning God's grace or God's will, or Θεοδόσιος [God given], is given to him. If it is a girl, she may be called Θεοδώρα (female form of Θεόδωρος).

### Given names indicating place of origin

<u>Name</u>	<u>Place of origin</u>
-Γεράσιμος Gerasimos	Kefallinia (island)
-Διονύσιος Dionysios (Nionios)	Zakynthos (island)
-Μαρίτσα Maritsa	Crete or Asia Minor
-female names ending in -ο	mostly Mainland
-ancient Greek names	mostly Asia Minor

(See variations of above names on Appendix B p.149).

### Name changes in adulthood

- **Priests** some times, upon ordination when joining the clergy, would receive a new name. Therefore, if his given name were Σωκράτης [Sokratis], after being ordained he might take the name Παύλος [Paulos] or some other saint's name.

The ordained person is usually called by his given (or new) name with the prefix Papa- [Papa-] indicating his title.

Example:

If his name were Σωκράτης Κανάκης [Sokratis Kanakis] and his new name were Παύλος [Paulos] he would be called Παπα-Παύλος [Papa-Paulos] or Παπα-Κανάκης [Papa-Kanakis]; but never Σωκράτης [Sokratis] nor Παπα-Σωκράτης [Papa-Sokratis].

- **A priest's wife** often is not called by her given name but by the name Πρεσβυτέρα [Presvytera] which is actually a title meaning "the wife of an elder" for it derives from Πρεσβύτερος [Presvyteros] which means elder)
- **Wives** some times are referred to by the name of their husbands on which the ending -αίνα [-aina] or -ίνα [-ina] is added.

Some times the given name of the husband is used and other times his surname.

Example:

If the husband's name is Παύλος [Paulos], the wife is called Παύλαινα [Paulaina]. Or if his surname is Πλατής [Platis] she may be called Πλατίνα [Platina].

### Variations of given names

It should also be noted that, for every Greek given name, there may exist several variations or nicknames which may appear quite different. Richard and Dick is an example of how this occurs in English. However on records the official name is recorded, not the altered name. Appendix B, p.149, includes a list of common Greek given names showing their variations and the usual English equivalents.

Male given names end in -as, -os, and -is. Female given names end in -a, or -i. Most female names ending in -o are from the mainland. There is no given Greek name that does not indicate the gender of the person who bears it. However there are names that appear in male and female forms.

Example:

<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Μάριος [Marios]	Μαρία [Maria]
Γεώργιος [Georgios]	Γεωργία [Georgia]

Note that instead of celebrating birth dates Greek people celebrate **name days**. For a list of given names, their variations, their English equivalents, and the dates those names are celebrated see Appendix B, p.149.

### **MIDDLE NAMES**

Greeks do **not** have middle names. What appears between the given name and the surname is not a middle name; it is the given

name of the person's father. Grammatically this is the possessive form of the father's name, similar to the -'s used in English.

Example:

Georgios, the son of Nikolaos Kanakis  
is: Georgios Nikolaou Kanakis.

Ioanna, the daughter of Nikolaos Kanakis  
is: Ioanna Nikolaou Kanaki.

For a **married woman** the name between her given name and her new surname is the given name of her husband. Today some women in Greece maintain their maiden name after marriage.

Upon divorce she receives back her father's given name and last name. This is mandatory without any exceptions.

The order in which the names are written is not always the same. The surname may be written first or last, and the father's (or the husband's) given name may be in the middle or at the end.

A child may be given two "given names." In some records the one given name will be written first, and in another record the other given name will be written first.

Example:

*The baptism record may state:*

Νικόλαος Ανδρέας	Γεωργίου	Κανάκης
Nikolaos Andreas	Georgiou	Kanakis
(given names)	(father's)	(surname)

*The recruiting record may state:*

Ανδρέας Νικόλαος	Γεωργίου	Κανάκης
Andreas Nikolaos	Georgiou	Kanakis

The name Andreas was placed first because in the Greek alphabet the letter "A" is before the letter "N" ).

## SURNAMES

Greek surnames can have various spellings.

For example the name *Katsakis* [Κατσάκης] in some records is found spelled *Katzakis* [Κατζάκης], depending on how the recorder heard it. Also the name *Skavatzos* [Σκαβάτζος], was found spelled *Skavatsos* [Σκαβάτσος], and some times *Skavantzos* [Σκαβάντζος]. In one death record it was stated: "Βαϊρακτιάρη, Χαρίκλεια" [Vairaktiari, Harikleia] 95 years old from Athens died 19 Oct 1866. The informant was her son "Χρήστος Μπαριακτάρης" [Hristos Mpariaktaris]. Note the different spelling of the last name which is the same last name!

### History of surnames

The Chinese were the first known people to acquire more than one name. The Emperor Fushi is said to have decreed the use of family names, or surnames, about 2850 B.C. No one was permitted to change his family name except in the event of adoption. The family name, placed first, comes from one of the 438 words in the Chinese sacred poem Po-Chia-Hsing, attributed to the Emperor Yao who reigned about 2350 B.C. The exact date when family names began is shrouded in legend but they clearly came into use over two thousand years ago.

The inherited family name is a comparatively recent development in the western world. Although a few ancient Greek families identified themselves by an ancestor's name, such as Atreides [descendants of Atreus] Danaos [descendants of Dan], the Romans appear to be the first Europeans to make regular use of family names. But the custom died out with the collapse of the Roman empire and the introduction of Christianity which recognized only the baptismal name.

In earlier centuries throughout Europe, one name was usually sufficient. But as populations increased it became necessary to distinguish between individuals with the same name. The problem was usually solved by adding descriptive information.

Thus we find John the tailor, John the son of Nicholas, John the short, or John from Thrace. When these "surnames" first came into being they were applied only to one person and not to the whole family. In time, these names became hereditary so that they passed from generation to generation. It is not possible to determine the exact year or even the century when hereditary family names were taken. In most countries, the process took two or three centuries to become universally established in the society. Hereditary names were first used by the nobility and wealthy land owners. Later the custom was followed by merchants and townspeople and eventually by the common village folk.

Surnames in the modern sense were used among Byzantine and Venetian nobility about the ninth century. From Venice the practice spread to much of Western Europe. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the custom was widely practiced in Britain and France. In Germany and Poland, the practice was well established by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In other areas, the process was much slower. In Scandinavia, most families used patronymic surnames which changed with each generation until the late 1800s when the government began requiring the usage of hereditary family names.

### **Surnames in Greece**

In the Balkan states, the practice of adopting fixed family names developed more slowly. Four centuries of Turkish rule delayed the wide-scale adoption of the practice.

In Greece, the family is a very revered institution. Family ties extend far beyond the immediate family. Family surnames came to be applied to these extended families or clans. This practice developed gradually from the time of the Byzantine Empire.

Even after surnames began to be used, a single given name was often all that was ever needed or used in everyday village life. Nevertheless, the Greek custom of naming children after their grandparents quickly produced a great many individuals in the same community with the same name. Nicknames were used to distinguish between persons with the same name. These nicknames developed just as the original surnames had developed; from father's names, occupations, and descriptions. This often resulted in the creation of a new surname. If, for example, there were several individuals named Paulos in the Doukas family, one might be called Paulos Kontos [Paulos the short], another might be called Karapaulos [black-haired Paulos] and another might be called Paulos Raptidis [Paulos the tailor's son]. The children of these individuals may take the original Doukas surname or the nickname may become a new surname. In the next few generations there may be so many individuals in the Karapaulos family with the name Ioannis that the process starts all over again. Thus, although hereditary family names were prevalent in Greece quite early, the names were not firmly fixed. This flexibility of surnames was commonplace, especially in villages until the third decade of the nineteenth century when Greece won her independence from Turkey. Surnames became much more firmly fixed after that time. Nevertheless the adoption of new surnames still occurred occasionally as late as the early 1900s. Do not be surprised, then, if you see changes in family surnames in your research. Some times both the old and new surname is listed on the records.

## **How are Surnames Formed**

Surnames from most cultures, especially the Western world, fall into five main categories; patronymics, descriptions, occupations, foreign terms, and places. Greek surnames are no exception.

### **• From Father's Name (patronymics)**

Surnames derived from the father's name are called Patronymics. This type of surname is the most prevalent among Greeks. Such names are formed by adding, to the father's given name, an ending meaning "son of."

### **• From Personal Characteristics**

Many surnames in Greece reflect some physical or personality characteristic of the original bearer. In some cases such nickname surnames refer to some event in the life of the individual. It is often difficult to figure out what such names actually refer to. Does a name like Mauros [black] mean that the bearer had black hair, dark complexion, or that he often wore black clothing? Does a name like Kaltsis [stockings] mean that the bearer made or sold stockings (see occupations below) or that he wore colorful stockings or had some experience with stockings that earned him the nickname? Sometimes family traditions can explain the origin of the name, especially if the name was adopted in recent generations. In most cases there is no way of knowing how the name originated.

Some surnames which reflect physical characteristics include: Kontos [short], Spanos [beardless], Spanidis or Spanopoulos [son of the beardless one], Xanthakos [blond], Kokkinis [red], Karas [Turkish for black or dark], Karapaulakis [son of dark-haired Paul], Galanis [blue-eyed], Katsaros [curly], Makris [long], Koutsogiorgos [lame George]. Some names reflect personality traits such as Leventis [brave, honorable], Katsoufis [never cheerful], Markogiannis [clever John],

Leontidis [lion's son] may indicate that the bearer roared like a lion when he was angry or that he had the courage of a lion.

### **• From Occupations and Titles**

Occupations are a rich source for surnames in all cultures. It is interesting to note that the most common occupational name in most countries, Smith, is seldom seen in Greece. This is because the working of metal was traditionally considered a Gypsy trade in Greece. Examples of occupational surnames include Raptis [tailor], Papoutsis [shoemaker], Mylonas [miller], Mylonatos or Mylonopoulos [son of the miller], Karvounis [coal man], Kapetanidis [son of ship captain], Anagnostopoulos [son of the acolyte, assistant priest], Sakellariou [son of the Sakellarios, a Byzantine ecclesiastical title], Kaffetzis [coffee house owner], Kaltsis [stockings, likely refers to one who sold stockings], Ktenas [comb, refers to one who sold or made them]. The name Karampinos derives from the word for musket or rifle. This likely refers to one who bore arms (in all probability against the Turks). The Greek tendency for patronymics gives us the name Karampinopoulos [son of a gun], an amusing name to Americans but quite normal in Greece.

Priests of the Orthodox Church are usually married men with families. Because of the great esteem with which the Greek people regard their priests, it is not surprising that a great many surnames give reference to priestly parentage. Surnames beginning with "Papa-" [priest] are the most numerous in Greece.

Names such as Papas [priest] and Papadopoulos [priest's son] are very common. Often the given name of the priest is used as a patronymic proceeded by the title "Papa-" yielding such names as Papagiannakis [priest John], Papapaulou, Papandreou, Papanikolatos, Papamichelis, Papakontos and Pakonstantopoulos.

Other titles are also seen as prefixes. "Hatzi-" [Χατζη-] is a title for one who has made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and has been baptized in the River Jordan.

The title "Mastro-" [Μαστρο-] indicates a skilled master craftsman. These titles produce such names as Hatzigiannakis and Mastrodimitros.

### • From Foreign Terms

Some Greek names are derived from words of other languages which have had ties with Greece. Turkish terms are most common but Spanish, Italian, Albanian and Slavic have also contributed names. This does not mean that a person with a surname that derives from a Turkish word has Turkish ancestry, but simply that a Turkish word was modified into a Greek surname. The term may be derived from an occupation, personal characteristic, nickname or place as discussed above. The most common surname of Turkish origin is Karas [black] which was noted earlier. Paras [money] is also of Turkish origin and may indicate an occupation such as money changer or merchant or perhaps it was a nickname for someone who acted rich. The surname Lekas probably derives from Turkish "leke" [mark, stain] and indicates the original bearer had a birthmark or other distinguishing mark. Katsakis would appear to be a patronymic from Crete, but actually derives from the Turkish word "kaçak" [fugitive, escapee]. This name was taken by a man who during Turkish rule, after being forcefully drafted by the Turks he deserted the Turkish army, and joined the Greeks who were fighting for their independence.

A number of names that derived from places have Turkish roots; Moraitis [from Morea, Turkish for Peloponnesus], Roumeliotis [from Rumeli, Turkish for Mainland Greece]. Sailors use many foreign terms. "Laska" is a Turkish word commonly used by sailors,

meaning "Let go! Slacken off (the rope)." Thus the names Laskos and Laskaridis indicate a nautical ancestor. "Deli" is Turkish for crazy or rash and gives us such names as Deligiannis [crazy John]. The prefix "Dela-," on the other hand is apparently of Italian origin meaning "of the" yielding names like Delapatridis [of the homeland]. Occasionally a given name is found in its Albanian or Slavic version which might produce a patronymic surname, such as Kolias [Albanian for Nikolaos].

### • From Places

Localities are only a minor source for Greek surnames. If an individual moves to another place, then his surname may be replaced by the name of his origin. Examples of surnames of this type are Kritikos [Cretan], Thessalonikos [of Thessalonika], Souliotis [of Souli, a region in the mountains of Epirus], Arvanitis [Albanian], and Nisiotis [from the islands]. Cyprus [Kypros] yields such names as Kypraïos, Kypraïou, Kypriadis, Kypriotis, Kypriotakis, and Kyprizoglou.



Residents of Hamako, Magnisias, 1905

Some places have become so associated with certain trades or other situations so that it is difficult to say whether the name derives from

the place or the association. Vlahos, or Vlahopoulos for example, refers to the Vlach people, a minority ethnic group from the Pindos mountains. These people were traditionally shepherds. Thus Vlahopoulos may mean son of a shepherd or son of a Vlach. Fragkos [French] usually means Catholic so that names such as Fragkos or Fragkogiannakopoulos refer to a religious rather than ethnic heritage.



Sotirios Moulas, Pelasgia, Fthiotidos, 1910

### **Endings that indicate the place of origin**

In Greece the endings of surnames vary from area to area, often indicating the place of origin. The ending “-opoulos” is most common on surnames in Peloponnese. Thus Thomas the son of Nicholas would be Thomas Nikolopoulos. The following list shows the endings and possible place of origin.

<u>Ending</u>	<u>Place of origin</u>
-opoulos	Peloponnese
-akis	Crete
-akos	Mani (South Peloponnese)
-eas	Mani (South Peloponnese)
-ias	Mani (South Peloponnese)

<u>Ending</u>	<u>Place of origin</u>
-atos	Kefallinia (island)
-elis	Lesvos (island)
-ikas	Thessaly
-akas	Thessaly
-oudis	Northern Greece
-idis	Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, Pontos, and other areas of Turkey
-adis	Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, Pontos, and other areas of Turkey
-oglou	Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, Pontos, and other areas of Turkey

Greek given names are often altered in everyday use. This is not unlike the way Richard becomes Dick in everyday English. The altered name may then be used as a surname; Kostas (from Konstantinos), Thanos (from Athanasios), Mitsos (from Dimitrios). Then an ending, such as -opoulos, may be added to the altered version. An example is the name Thanopoulos [son of Athanasios]. A list of given names and their altered versions is given in Appendix B, p.149.

## **GRAMMAR AND SURNAMES**

As briefly explained in chapter 10 grammatical endings can affect all Greek words including the names of people and places. In actual documents, names may have grammatical (different) endings depending on their usage in a sentence. When you record names on genealogical forms always put them in the standard form (nominative case).

The grammatical possessive case of the given name (an “-ou” ending) is widely used in much of Greece to form the patronymic, resulting in names like Grigoriou from Grigorios.

The “-ou” ending is one of the endings used to form a woman’s surname from a man’s surname. Most surnames have different endings when the bearer is male or female.

Example:

<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Κοντός [Kontos]	Κοντού [Kontou]
Κανάκης [Kanakis]	Κανάκη [Kanaki]
Τάκος [Tacos]	Τάκου [Takou]

In some cases sons may be called Παπαϊωάννου [Papaioannou] meaning "of Papaioannis," in which case the surnames of their wives and children (male and female) would have the same ending.

Some of the most common male endings and their female counterparts are:

<u>male</u>		<u>female</u>	
-ος -os	becomes	-ου -ou	
-ας -as	becomes	-α -a	
-ες -es	becomes	-ε -e	
-ης -is	becomes	-η or -ου -i or -ou	

Examples:

<u>Changeable Endings</u>	
<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Μίχος Mihos	Μίχου Mihou

Καρράς Karras	Καρρά Karra
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Πλατής Platis	Πλατή Plati
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<u>Unchangeable Endings</u>	
<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>

Παπανδρέου Papandreou	Παπανδρέου Papandreou
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Νικολάου Nikolaou	Νικολάου Nikolaou
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(For more about Greek grammar see chapter 10, *The Language*, p. 127)



Men sitting at the café of the central square of a small Greek town on a Sunday morning, 1932